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help to kindle their admiration and enthusiasm for all that is lovely in literature, and noble in conduct and character.

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2.— *The Literary Life and Correspondence of the Countess of Blessington.* By R. R. MADDEN, M. R. I. A., Author of *Travels in the East*, etc., etc., etc. New York: Harper and Brothers. 1855. 2 vols. 24mo. pp. 547, 599.

THE name of Dr. Madden has been familiar to us for many years, in a ghostly sort of way, as the author of sundry unreadable books, and a hanger-on of titled people in different parts of the world. The present work is saved, by the interest that attaches to many literary names occurring in it, from the awful obscurity into which his other works dropped stillborn from the press. The principal heroine is of course Lady Blessington; but she could not, of herself, have sufficed to rescue these ponderous tomes from the fate of their predecessors. A lady whose early career is surrounded by a mythical cloud, from which she emerged into the false glare of a middle age of extravagance and vanity, leading to disastrous overthrow and flight, can hardly be an object of permanent interest to sober, thinking people. She first became known in this country by the glowing descriptions in Mr. Willis's *Pencilings by the Way*. Others have since helped to blazon her personal and mental charms, and her literary genius. She aspired to be a leader of society; but her circle included only men. The ladies of England may be, as they have been, accused of prudery, by those who desire to lower the tone of society by lessening the rigor of its moral laws; but to their honor be it said, they have steadily maintained the dignity of their sex, by withholding their countenance socially from those who have tarnished the jewel of their souls. Literary and accomplished *Aspasia*s may gather around themselves men of talent and genius; they may dazzle by their luxury, and fascinate by the graces of their conversation; but there is a barrier of womanly displeasure which hems them in, and which, in English society, they cannot overpass. Lady Blessington, after many years of more than Oriental extravagance passed on the Continent, in which her husband, a weak-minded absentee Irish landlord, squandered the revenues drawn from his wretched tenantry on costly palaces, and gilded furniture, and sybaritic dinners, returned to London, with Count D'Orsay, the separated husband of her husband's daughter, and there, upon a moderate jointure, made the vain attempt

to keep up the splendor to which she had been accustomed in her husband's lifetime. We find her house frequented by eminent persons, from the aristocracy of England ; we find great historical names gathered around her, as if she were really the star which her flatterers would have the world believe. Noblemen and gentlemen, authors and artists, add their presence to the fascinations of the scene ; but noblemen's wives and gentlemen's wives, author's wives and artist's wives, are never mentioned in this gay and brilliant company. And when the bubble bursts, and the pageant is over, what sorrowful scenes are disclosed to the eye of the moralist ! An execution put into the gorgeous palace, where such revellings have been ; crowds of curious and gossiping people filling the elegant saloons, and lounging on luxurious divans ; scarcely one truly sympathizing friend to lament the dire catastrophe ; the splendid vagabond, Count Alfred D'Orsay, first imprisoned, like Dick Swiveller, in the house, except on Sundays, and then obliged to flee to France, with a single valet and valise,—a fugitive, and a swindler of honest tradesmen, whose patience had been exhausted by broken promises and eternal failures to pay ; and the gorgeous furniture, the silken hangings, the works of art, the sumptuously-bound books, that surrounded the goddess of the place, knocked down by the hammer of the eloquent auctioneer, George Robbins. A hurried flight to France, whither the battered Adonis had preceded her, a few brief days of disappointment and sorrow and desertion, a sudden death, close the melancholy history.

If we judge of Lady Blessington's powers by the influence she apparently wielded over men of talent, we shall estimate her intellectual gifts very highly. But this would be a false standard ; for none are more impressible than men of genius to the fascinations of the soft voice, the bright eye, the beautiful dress, the rich furniture, which such a woman knows how to employ. If we judge of her by the *descriptions* of her conversation given us by admiring frequenters of her saloons, we shall again place her high on the list of intellectual women. But here, too, the standard would be a false one ; for these same accessories lend a delusive charm to words, which, if spoken by an unknown person in a gingham dress, would never have arrested attention a single moment. It is a curious fact, that, of all these brilliant conversations, whose effects are so enthusiastically described, nothing is reported beyond the reach of very commonplace powers of talk. Of her writings, the novels of society, in which we might have supposed she would excel, in tone and style are uniformly flat. The characters are drawn without vigor ; the dialogues are carried on without point ; the stories display the very poorest invention ; the reflections are superficial, and the morality of

that shallow and obtrusive kind, which people of doubtful lives are ever ready to furnish in phrases to make up for the short-comings of their conduct. The conversations with Lord Byron, however, are vigorous and instructive; incomparably the best of her ladyship's prose writings. Here she apparently found something solid and real to deal with. The annuals which she edited with contributions by noble persons, — the Books of Beauty, the Children of the Nobility, and Heaven knows what besides, — why, it is impossible to express, in anything but the language of infinitesimal mathematics, their literary merits. Can any human being recall a line or phrase, in any or all of them, which the most comprehensive literary charity would wish to rescue from oblivion? Her Ladyship's verses are of that intolerable kind to which neither gods nor columns grant permission to exist; and what is singular, all the verses made by poets and poetasters under the inspiration of her society have a leaden dulness about them, which is almost preternatural. The Smiths themselves cease to be witty. Lord Erskine's lines halt as if the gout had struck into them from his legs. Mr. Madden parades three or four heavy pieces discharged by "Dr. William Beattie, M. D." at Lady Blessington and himself. Dr. Beattie was the modest author of the *Heliotrope*, a poem; of *John Huss*, another poem; and we believe of several other works in verse; and he "was a frequent contributor to the periodicals edited by Lady Blessington." He ought to have been let alone; but Dr. Madden must needs add to the other ponderosities of his book three or four mortal pages of occasional verses from this deluded man. In one of Dr. Madden's letters to Lady Blessington he compliments her by a story of "some pages of manuscript, inscribed 'Extracts from Lady Blessington's Works,' found among the papers of a lamented friend who was one of your greatest admirers, and has died in the prime of life, of consumption." No wonder, poor man!

There are many evidences in this book of Lady Blessington's real kindness of heart, and amiability of manners, — and that is nearly all that can be said. Her acquaintance with famous men, and their correspondence, would have furnished materials for a readable volume. But we must say, that we have been grievously disappointed by the greater part of the letters which Dr. Madden has printed. Sir William Gell, the Bulwers, Landor, and others, appear to very little advantage. There is an exaggerated, falsetto tone running through their letters to her, as well as through Mr. Willis's, and even through those of our good Connecticut countrywoman, Mrs. Sigourney, as if they were conscious of the unreal mockery concealed under the form of idolatry at the Gore House shrine. There is but one really good letter in the volumes, and that is written by Charles Dickens, from Milan. The de-

scription of the purse is in his best manner. The infinite vivacity of his genius was an overmatch for the influences under which he was brought, like the rest, in that enchanted castle. We cannot help quoting a passage of this spirited letter.

“The Roman amphitheatre there [at Verona] delighted me, beyond expression. I never saw anything so full of solemn, ancient interest. There are the four-and-forty rows of seats, as fresh and perfect as if their occupants had vacated them but yesterday; the entrances, passages, dens, rooms, corridors; the numbers over some of the arches. An equestrian troop had been there some days before, and had scooped out a little ring at one end of the arena, and had their performances in that spot. I should like to have seen it, of all things, for its very dreariness. Fancy a handful of people sprinkled over one corner of the great place, (the whole population of Verona would n't fill it now,) and a spangled cavalier bowing to the echoes and the grass-grown walls! I climbed to the topmost seat, and looked away at the beautiful view for some minutes; when I turned round and looked down into the theatre again, it had exactly the appearance of an immense straw hat, to which the helmet in the Castle of Otranto was a baby; the rows of seats representing the different plaits of straw, and the arena the inside of the crown.

“I had great expectations of Venice, but they fell immeasurably short of the wonderful reality. The short time I passed there went by me in a dream. I hardly think it possible to exaggerate its beauties, its sources of interest, its uncommon novelty and freshness. A thousand and one realizations of the thousand and one nights could scarcely captivate and enchant me more than Venice. . . .

“Your old house at Albaro — Il Paradiso — is spoken of as yours to this day. What a gallant place it is! I don't know the present inmate, but I hear that he bought and furnished it not long since with great splendor, in the French style, and that he wishes to sell it. I wish I were rich, and could buy it. There is a third-rate wine-shop below Byron's house; and the place looks dull, and miserable, and ruinous enough.

“Old ——— is a trifle uglier than when I first arrived. He has periodical parties, at which there are a great many flower-pots and a few ices, — no other refreshments. He goes about constantly charged with extemporaneous poetry, and is always ready, like tavern-dinners, on the shortest notice and the most reasonable terms. He keeps a gigantic harp in his bedroom, together with pen, ink, and paper, for fixing his ideas as they flow, — a kind of profane King David, but truly good-natured and very harmless.

“Pray say to Count D'Orsay everything that is cordial and loving from me. The travelling purse he gave me has been of immense service. It has been constantly opened. All Italy seems to yearn to put its hand in it. I think of hanging it, when I come back to England, on a nail, as a trophy, and of gashing the brim like the blade of an old sword, and saying to my son and heir, as they do upon the stage: ‘You see this notch, boy? Five hundred francs were laid low on that day for post-horses. Where this gap is, a waiter charged your father treble the correct amount — and got it. This end, worn into teeth

like the rasped edge of an old file, is sacred to the Custom-houses, boy, this passport, and the shabby soldiers at town gates, who put an open hand and a dirty coat-cuff into the coach-windows of all Forestieri. Take it, boy. Thy father has nothing else to give ! ' ' — Vol. II. pp. 225, 226.

Lady Blessington's own letters abound in good feeling, and have a certain literary merit, not of a very high order. They are more sincere in tone than those of her correspondents generally to her. But the literary opinions she expresses are often wonderfully extravagant. She writes, for example, to Sir William Drummond, of his "beautiful poem, Odin," that "passages in it are of such transcendent merit as to be above all comparison except with Shakespeare and Milton. In the sublimity and harmony of your verses, you have equalled, if not surpassed, the latter ; and in originality of ideas and variety, you strikingly resemble the former" !!!

We should like to know how many of the present generation of Englishmen ever read one line of "Sir William Drummond's Odin." Indeed, these letters resemble in tone nothing more closely than the antistrophic rhapsodies of the *société d'admiration mutuelle*.

Dr. Madden's part of the book is made up in the worst possible manner. Not content with the infinite deal of nothing with which the volumes are filled, he must needs crowd into a heavy appendix such trash as "Proceedings on Inquest on the Body of Joseph Lonergan, shot by Edmund Power," the father of Lady Blessington ; "Prosecution of Edmund Power for Libel on Colonel Bagwell" ; "Certificate of Burial of Members of the Blessington Family" ; "Annuities, Mortgages, Judgments, and other Debts, Legacies, Sums of Money, and Incumbrances, charged upon or affecting the Estates of the said Charles John, Earl of Blessington, at the time of his Decease" ; — and other equally interesting matters.

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3. — *Prémices*, by E. FOXTON. Boston: Ticknor and Fields. 1855. 16mo. pp. 196.

THIS volume, as its title seems to indicate, is the first fruits of the author in the way of poetical production. It consists of three parts, each of the first two containing a poem of considerable length, and the third a few miscellaneous pieces. The first, *Hilda*, is a love story of chivalry, the departure of which Burke so eloquently lamented. It purports to be told by a friend to a friend, the evening after one of the